Virginian Creeper

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Virginian Creeper

by sainthannibal

Summary

Will dumped his dishes in the sink, and they clattered against the stainless steel basin.

"You don't even like the woods anyway," he muttered as he grabbed the worn, blue sponge, squeezing it in his fist. The faucet squeaked in protest as he turned it on with far too much force. He started scrubbing the residue of brain from his plate.

"That is a lie." Hannibal's voice was firm. "I appreciate the great outdoors. The woods are a favorite place of mine. The courtyard of my mind palace is a beautiful, Lousianian bayou." Hannibal stood, but the chair did not scrape against the floor. He approached Will carefully from behind. Will only scrubbed the dishes harder, fingers digging into the soapy sponge.

"How could I not like the woods? The place where I first encountered the marvel of the Rougarou?"

or

Companion Piece to Dianthus Barbatus, set after the last chapter, before the epilogue.

Notes

Hello!

Welcome back! I'm so glad to give this little piece that is set before the epilogue of Dianthus Barbatus.

A sequel will hopefully be in the works this summer ;)

I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

I cling to you in both sunshine and shade.

“‘If the leaves or berries are chewed they can cause irritation to the lips, mouth, tongue, and throat,’” Will read from his notes he had written down the night prior, now sitting in his old pajamas at the kitchen table. “‘Although rare, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, and difficulty swallowing have been reported after swallowing plants with oxalate crystals. The symptoms generally develop quickly and can last for up to half a day,’” he said firmly, looking up from his notebook.

"Darling," Hannibal said, stretching across from him and taking a whiff of his perfectly brewed cappuccino from the black mug cradled in his hands, "this ‘Wikipedia’ where you retrieved this information from does not seem like a reliable source worthy of our consultation."

Will scoffed as he stood up from the table, the chair scooting across the floor loudly. He planted his bare feet on the cold tile with notebook in hand and tossed his glasses onto the table.

"The berries are poisonous, as they contain a high concentration of oxalic acid, which is moderately toxic to humans and dogs." He slammed his notebook down and promptly snatched his plate and complementing white mug from the table. "This is my house, Hannibal! If you don't like it, get your own place in Baltimore and plant Virginian Creeper there. God knows your commute to work will be easier. Why not?"

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Will stared down at the leftover pink bits that circled the drain.

"You really went through all that effort to make my favorite breakfast, just to butter me up? So I'd let you get that stupid plant?" Will threw the sponge in the sink. It hit the basin with a wet plop. Will whirled around to find Hannibal so close he would have pressed into him if he took another step.

"You better step back 'cause I got cars in the shop that need fixin'," he growled as he moved to leave to get ready for work, but warm, steady hands placed themselves on Will's shoulders.

The morning sun peered through the window, revealing a mischievous flint in Hannibal's eye. Will's own widened, his eyebrows shooting up as understanding washed over him.

"No," Will pushed Hannibal away by the chest. "It was never about the house. You wouldn't let the dogs- you wouldn't let *Sasha* - you want," Will swallowed and threw his head in his hands, "No, no. We're not moving! No!"

"The FBI has a name for us now. The Chesapeake Ripper. And we have no knowledge of what they know," Hannibal countered, sincerity in his voice. Concern for his own safety.

"Hannibal, if I apply, they'll take one look at what happened in Louisiana and I won't pass based on the grounds of my stability," Will crossed his arms over his chest, heels planted firmly on the cold tile.

Hannibal pressed his lips together in a pleased smile. Will's eyebrows shot further up his forehead and he clutched his upper arms, the tips of his fingers brushing the edges of his sleeves.

"You want me to teach at the academy," Will concluded, staring up at Hannibal for confirmation, as if he would ever choose to be that transparent, even to Will.

"Academic circles are still raving about your monograph. I've heard whispers asking about Will Graham and if he will come back to publish more."

"They probably just want to study me," Will muttered grievously, tucking his chin to his chest as he observed the floor. A calloused thumb brushed his cheekbone, just above his beard and stroking to his side-burn.

"I won't let that happen." Hannibal brought his forehead to Will's, searching for the only pair of eyes that truly saw him for what he was. A terrifying creature who could only be tamed by another.

"We won't let that happen." Will's gaze rivaled Hannibal's, icy blue against blazing red.

His palm left Will's cheek just to give Will a pointed look. He huffed, his fingers twitching as he fought the urge to grab the box of cigarettes from the counter. "You and I both know what happened to the last trainee Jack sent on a wild goose chase." Hannibal grinned wider than he had all morning. "If I go in there, he'll catch wind of me and he is so desperate that he'd snatch me up like a coveted bloodhound--"

Will paused mid-sentence again. He had been the only one interrupting his rants. Hannibal had been quiet this whole time, but his presence had certainly not been silent.

"You don't just want to know what's happening. You want to be part of it." Hannibal approached the dining table, letting his arm brush against Will's as he passed, folding the table cloth and draping it over his arm to shake it loose right outside the patio door.

Will stood in the middle of the small kitchen, watching Sasha jaunt after Hannibal happily. Even just stepping outside, she followed him dutifully and planted herself right beside the door for when he walked back inside. Her tail wagged forcefully back and forth and she panted, her muzzle open in such a way it looked like she could have been smiling.

"Damn." He took a shaky breath, his blue eyes brimming with tears. "I- I-," His voice faltered as he let himself be lost in thought, considering the possibilities of Hannibal's plan. The door squeaked as it opened, but closed silently. "I love you," His breath was finite, like a man struck by a vision of stars as they fell from the sky.

Hannibal sauntered back to the kitchen, weaving around Will as if he was not standing dumbfounded in the center of the room. He rummaged through the drawer and picked out his apron. Tying it around his waist to protect his precious red cashmere sweater, he then adorned his hands with rubber gloves and dove into the sink, scrubbing away at the plates and dirtied pots and pans.

"There have to be a few conditions, Hannibal." Will grabbed the cigarettes off the counter and pulled one from the box. He stuck it between his teeth and inhaled as he lit the tip. He took a drag, watching with a subdued smirk as he watched Hannibal turn around with a wrinkled nose.

"Must you smoke inside?"

"I bought the house, Hannibal. And I'll smoke in it if I damn well please." He took another puff. "First rule: They can't know about us."

"Well, of course not. I don't intend for either of us to get caught."

"No, sugar." Will held the cigarette between his fingers and took a step forward, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's waist. "They can't know about *us* ." He pressed a smoky kiss to Hannibal's neck. He shivered under Will's soft breath and fiery touch on his skin.

He floated away with the swiftness of a ghost before either of them could be distracted from the conversation they needed to have, retreating to the dining table. He leaned against it as he smoked his morning cigarette, the familiar tobacco bringing him clarity of thought. He sat on the edge, blowing smoke from his nostrils.

"Second," Will resumed, "that means you're gonna have to find your own place."

"I'll miss you, then." Hannibal's voice went soft, barely audible to Will's ear.

"I'll be around, and you have a key. You can come back to visit your husband anytime you'd like." Will put out his cigarette on an ashtray as he plotted. "Because I know how much you love the woods," he added with a teasing smile.

"Just think, you can put as much Virginian Creeper there you want, because, three, Sasha stays here with me."

Dishes clattered in the sink.

Hannibal whipped around to glare at Will with homicidal intent.

“Listen here, honey,” Will reasoned, dropping the cigarette butt into the ashtray, “The image of Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the human veil that you drape yourself with, won’t involve dogs. Cats if you really want a companion, but not a dog. Will Graham is the dog person. But the prim and proper Dr. Count Hannibal Lecter the eighth?”

Hannibal’s sigh was heavy with relent, but laced acceptance, like a man who knew what had to be done.

“Like I said, sweetheart, you can come on over whenever you so damn please.”

"Sweet William," Hannibal's voice rang out as clear as a gunshot from deep in the forest, or screams of a woman being torn apart by the jaws of wild beasts. “I don’t want to be alone again.”

Will turned around and stared at Hannibal with teary eyes. The morning breeze had ruffled his hair, the soft tufts flopping over his temple.

“We’ve just found each other. And you want to break us apart? I’ve let you into my mind, and you’ve let me into yours. I will live in Baltimore, fine, but having Sasha is having a remnant of you to remind me that I have found a marvel who knows me. Who sees me. Without you I am set adrift to a sea of loneliness on which I wish not to sail. I cannot-” He paused, tears making his eyes shine like polished rubies. “I cannot do that again. Never again without even a piece of you by my side.”

“Hannibal,” Will’s words were solemn, the traces of smoke billowing to Hannibal’s nose, “This is not goodbye. For the sake of our plan, *your* plan, you and I need to live separately and pretend that we have never met. She is not part of your image, but of mine. We cannot bear even a passing resemblance to each other. But behind closed doors...” He exhaled as he stepped closer to him. “Alone in the moonlight, we will know the truth. We will see each other, know each other, taste each other.” The whispered promises rolled off of his tongue as the mongoose approached the snake. Tears pricked the corners of his eyes until they shined like a glaze over the finest of ceramics.

“Are you sure that we will see each other as we do now?”

“I am.”

“Then I will trust you, as you’ve trusted me. No longer is trust a fickle thing, but an oath to a god whom I believe in.”

Hannibal stood over the sink with his gloved hands braced on the edge of the counter, head looking down into the basin.

“Will?”

“Yes, darlin’?”

"Care to dry?"

He nodded and Hannibal tossed him a dish towel. He caught the rag, and with it, their tacit agreement. A smile took over his face, replacing the open mouth that would have started catching flies if he left it open longer. Turning to meet Hannibal back at the sink, Will wrapped one end of the towel around his palm.

"I'll apply to the academy first thing tomorrow morning." Will whipped the towel playfully, hitting Hannibal with a loud smack on the ass. The man's shoulders bounced in surprise. He turned to stare at Will with mouth agape in shock and dignified horror.

But Will did not falter. He grabbed the wet pan from Hannibal's gloved hands with a wild grin and a self-assured wink.

"You'll be busy the rest of the day." Hannibal blushed and set down the dish to peel off his gloves. Will grabbed at the apron strings and tugged at the cashmere.

"I suppose the dishes can wait."

End Notes

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